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on Wednesday, 10 July 1996, at 10 a.m.

President: Mr. MOUBARAK (Lebanon)
(Vice-President)

CONTENTS

OPERATIONAL ACTIVITIES OF THE UNITED NATIONS FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION (continued)

(c) CONSIDERATION OF THE REPORTS OF THE EXECUTIVE BOARDS OF THE UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME/UNITED NATIONS POPULATION FUND, THE UNITED NATIONS CHILDREN'S FUND AND THE WORLD FOOD PROGRAMME

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In the absence of Mr. Gervais (Côte d'Ivoire), Mr. Moubarak (Lebanon), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.25 a.m.

OPERATIONAL ACTIVITIES OF THE UNITED NATIONS FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION (continued)

(c) CONSIDERATION OF THE REPORTS OF THE EXECUTIVE BOARDS OF THE UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME/UNITED NATIONS POPULATION FUND, THE UNITED NATIONS CHILDREN'S FUND AND THE WORLD FOOD PROGRAMME (E/1996/32, Parts I and II, E/1996/64/Add.1 and 3, E/1996/68, 69, 73 and 74; E/1996/L.19 and DP/1996/11 and 17)

Mr. SPETH (Administrator, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)) said that UNDP had invested considerable time and money in making the Resident Coordinator system work. It had also put in place a number of training measures and was actively cooperating with other Funds and Programmes. It looked forward to the development of a system in which Funds and Programmes would actually collaborate in country-driven, goal-oriented projects rather than simply sharing information. It had also been encouraged by the progress which had been achieved on common premises, country strategy notes and the harmonization of budget and programming cycles.

Much work remained to be done both at Headquarters and at the country level to fully implement General Assembly resolution 50/120. However, one very positive development had been the establishment of cooperation between UNDP and the Bretton Woods institutions. UNDP had not succumbed to the conditionalities required by those institutions; cooperation simply meant that the two bodies could work together more effectively on initiatives stemming from major United Nations conferences. UNDP's connection with the Bretton Woods institutions had also led to increased cooperation and cohesion at the country level. UNDP would seek to promote progress towards the objectives of General Assembly resolution 50/120 and to maximize cooperation and harmonization. It hoped to address the discrepancy between what was expected of resident coordinators and the lack of resources provided to them.

It was widely recognized that the United Nations had a vital role to play in the wake of emergencies. UNDP was in the forefront of exploring ways to enhance the Organization's response to such circumstances.

Regarding reform, UNDP had made dramatic changes to the way it allocated resources to countries. Poverty eradication had become its overriding mandate and full emphasis had been placed on the link between economic growth and human development. Significant changes had also been made to the Programme's system of accountability and its approach to evaluation. UNDP was pleased that 90 per cent of its core resources were spent in low-income countries, and that one third of its total resources went directly to poverty eradication, the remainder being spent on good governance and strengthening the resource base. Internally, UNDP had charted a new direction for itself and was actively seeking to achieve its self-imposed targets.

Ms. SADIK (Executive Director, United Nations Population Fund) said that progress had been made on many of the provisions of General Assembly resolution 50/120 and on coordination of operational activities in general, as witnessed by the productive work of the various inter-agency mechanisms such as the Joint Consultative Group on Policy and the Administrative Committee on Coordination. Inter-agency task forces had been set up to facilitate the coherent and coordinated implementation of the programmes of action of recent international conferences. Other important system-wide initiatives such as the United Nations Special Initiative on Africa had also promoted coordinated action at the country level.

The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) had participated actively in the various coordination efforts with a view to injecting meaningful change and added value to the various operations of the Funds and Programmes involved. Its report (E/1996/68) outlined some of the perceived benefits and drawbacks of the Resident Coordinator system and the country strategy note. The latter should not become just another bureaucratic requirement but actually add value to the existing development process.

Thus far limited progress had been made in harmonizing programming processes and guidelines, including monitoring and evaluation. Within various inter-agency forums, considerable attention had been devoted to developing a common understanding and action at field level with respect to country strategy

notes, the programme approach, national execution and implementation modalities, and guidelines for the Resident Coordinator system.

The whole issue of national execution needed to be addressed much more carefully, including the question of how to assess whether Governments had sufficient capacity for national execution and how best to develop such capacity in the shortest possible time with the most effective use of limited resources. UNFPA had moved ahead much too quickly without proper preparations and planning, and in so doing the Fund had not used resources as effectively as it could have. Moreover, the matter of capacity building needed to be carefully reviewed. The Fund needed to examine whether it was actually contributing to capacity building or whether it was simply financing the delivery of activities which were sustainable only as long as substantial outside funding was available. Another priority area was coordination of effective monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. It was necessary to document the results of UNFPA activities and to analytically identify lessons learned.

In the area of common service and premises, UNFPA had a long tradition of sharing and pooling resources, particularly with UNDP. In most cases, UNFPA shared common premises with UNDP and drew upon a wide array of common administrative, accounting and other services for which UNFPA reimbursed UNDP and the United Nations.

Motivation should always be based on concerns for country-level coordination and the need for more relevant, effective and timely assistance to countries. The number and complexity of guidelines, procedures and processes needed to be further streamlined, simplified and reduced. UNFPA needed to better define how to develop the partnerships it had established with non-governmental organizations and focus on more specific programme collaboration. The importance of ensuring coordination with all partners, including the Bretton Woods institutions and bilateral donors, should be borne in mind. Finally, it was essential for both developing and donor countries to commit resources for development and to honour the agreements reached at recent international conferences.

Ms. BERTINI (Executive Director, World Food Programme) said that as far as the World Food Programme (WFP) was concerned, reform was an ongoing process. The Programme had to respond to emergencies all over the world and therefore required operational flexibility and an effective anticipation and

reaction capacity. To that end, WFP had put in place a number of important reform and revitalization measures connected with governance, operational effectiveness, resourcing, accountability, programme changes and coordination.

WFP had been strengthened institutionally at the beginning of the 1990s with a commensurate increase in its decision-making capability. Since emergency operations accounted for two thirds of its work, the Programme had developed a rapid response capability and an early warning system. In addition, more logistics and emergency relief experts had been recruited, decision-making had been shifted to the field level and greater emphasis had been placed on food purchases and logistics contracts in developing countries.

An effort had been made to boost donors' confidence in how WFP solicited and managed its resource, and in order to ensure greater accountability the Programme's internal audit facility had doubled in size and an office of inspection and investigation had been established. A review of financial accounting and control in field offices had been initiated and a major financial management improvement programme had been put in place, necessitating the recruitment of an increased number of financial officers.

As a result of the adoption of the programme approach, WFP had concentrated its efforts on the world's poorest countries. It had therefore reassessed its operations and had phased out activities in middle-income countries which had the capacity to manage food aid programmes independently. The Programme had actively targeted women since they were the ones directly responsible for food management, and considerable efforts had been made to ensure that food assistance went primarily to them. In addition, WFP had actively tried to recruit more women. Overall, the Programme wished to stress a longer-term strategic vision of its mission envisaging a move towards food security. Internal reforms had attempted to reflect that reorientation.

WFP had signed a number of memorandums of understanding with other United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations, and had adopted many ideas from its development partners. Significant cost savings had been realized in the areas of transport, logistics and documentation, and all of the reforms currently being undertaken by the Programme were being achieved within budget.

Ms. SHAM POO (Deputy Executive Director, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)) said that UNICEF had made significant progress in implementation of General Assembly resolution 50/120 (1995), particularly with regard to common

premises, the development of country strategy notes and the harmonization of country programming cycles. Implementation could be facilitated in the coming years with the benefit of political support and clear guidelines from the Council.

UNICEF had committed itself to ongoing reform aimed at revitalization of the organization, through its first mission statement, to be produced by the end of 1996, and its management excellence programme. That programme involved representatives from the Executive Board, host countries and staff at all levels. Moreover, staff had produced their own clear set of principles and professional standards, which had been adopted by the management steering committee for use in future performance evaluation.

UNICEF was keenly aware that enhanced coordination was vital to the success of all its operational activities. To that end, it strove to support Governments in their coordination of external cooperation, recognizing that agencies needed to work on their differing mandates with the benefit of access to relevant national bodies.

However, UNICEF's ability to discharge its functions was dependent on access to adequate funds. It had seen no increase in its core resources in 1995 and, in order to help fund country programmes, it had turned to the private sector. Over 30 per cent of UNICEF's contributions from industrialized and developing countries in 1995 had come from the private sector. It would continue to examine in-country funding opportunities as well as maximization of its comparative advantage in order to make best use of existing funds.

UNICEF had issued directives to field officers for the implementation of resolutions at the country level, and had circulated a newsletter outlining United Nations reforms and their impact on UNICEF operations. In terms of personnel, the organization remained committed to training and to the secondment of capable professionals to resident coordinator positions. It hoped that more UNICEF staff, particularly women, would be put forward for those positions, as they continued to be under-represented.

Mr. KAMANDO (United Republic of Tanzania) asked whether the new arrangements for harmonization of country programming cycles, to which the Administrator had referred, would introduce funding conditionalities, preventing countries which had not yet completed their country strategy notes from gaining automatic access to funding. He also asked whether the UNFPA proposal for an

examination of absorptive capacity was intended to deny help to countries which had no capacity for absorption.

Mr. SPETH (Administrator, United Nations Development Programme) replied that no conditionality attached to the new programming arrangement; the least developed countries would continue to receive around 60 per cent of resources, while regional percentages would remain intact. The new arrangement simply moved away from a strict mathematical equation to a slightly more discretionary system, whereby strong country programmes would be encouraged. UNDP hoped to encourage recipient countries to take its poverty alleviation mandate into account, but did not wish to add to the requirements placed on them by the international donor community.

Ms. SADIK (Executive Director, United Nations Population Fund) said that the proposal for an absorptive capacity study was intended to help assess, strengthen and develop national programme implementation capacity, while providing agencies with information to help them prioritize their activities. The proposal had received broad support from countries in sub-Saharan Africa and elsewhere and did not seek to impose new assistance conditionalities.

Mr. BRESLER (United States of America) asked whether UNDP saw any scope for the harmonization of country strategy notes with the country plans of the Bretton Woods institutions, or whether it saw those programmes as serving different and distinct purposes.

Mr. HAMDAN (Lebanon) said that the Council wanted to know about the difficulties and obstacles which lay in the way of implementing resolution 50/120, and whether the various executive heads had any suggestions as to how to address those difficulties.

Ms. BROWNE (Ireland), speaking on behalf of the European Union, said that since the informal dialogue was important for the Council in its oversight function, the reports which had been presented to it might have contained a little more substance. While the inclusion of information on management processes had been appreciated, more detail should have been provided on issues such as common premises and services. Moreover, it would be helpful if the executive heads would keep the Council informed of progress on a more regular basis throughout the year, so that all groups involved could facilitate better cooperation at the field level. The Council had heard a great deal about the concepts of decentralization of authority, harmonization and simplification of

procedures and the need to accelerate the information flow between headquarters and the field, but had not heard enough about how much was being done to translate those concepts into action.

Mr. CHATAIGNIER (France) wanted to know what resources the agencies had committed for the implementation of General Assembly resolution 50/120, and whether they felt that the resident coordinator system worked in favour of UNDP in terms of coordinator recruitment. He wondered whether the executive heads felt they were adequately represented in the coordinator system and whether they were satisfied with management of the resident coordinator system at headquarters, and with the location of the support services. They should indicate their views on the possible secondment of some of their personnel to that office, with a view to enhancing coordination. They might further consider whether the management excellence programme should also be applied to the resident coordinator system, involving staff at the field level.

Mr. SABOIA (Brazil) inquired about the role of the Executive Boards in the current reform process, and whether there had been any tendency towards micro-management on their part. With regard to allocation of resources, he would be interested to know what steps had been taken to consider the absorption capacity of countries and to mobilize other resources. Finally, the resident coordinator system could be used to promote opportunities for South-South cooperation, and he inquired about coordination between field offices in that respect.

Mr. FEDORTCHENKO (Russian Federation) said that his delegation would like to learn more about UNFPA mechanisms for regional cooperation, whether such mechanisms existed in all regions and the role of the regional commissions and the resident coordinators in regional coordination. With regard to the response of UNDP and other funds and agencies to crisis situations, he wondered if the early warning system instituted by the Department of Humanitarian Affairs was helpful, and how UNDP in particular would address the general development needs of countries after a natural disaster.

Finally, in the Eastern European region and the Commonwealth of Independent States, only eight countries had resident representatives, and he inquired about the potential for participation by United Nations agencies in that region.

Mr. SPETH (Administrator, United Nations Development Programme) said that certainly, a stronger relationship was needed between the country documents

prepared by the Bretton Woods institutions and country strategy notes; however, the documents should not be merged as they served different purposes. With regard to the status of the resident coordinator system, since the adoption of General Assembly resolutions 47/199 and 50/120, there had been a dramatic strengthening of the system, both in legislative authority and actual practice and some progress had been made in harmonization and simplification of procedures. He noted, however, that the operational activities system had been given mandates for which no one party was accountable. The advantage was that no action was taken unless all parties were in agreement, but it was difficult to move forward without a clear accountability structure.

The Executive Board of UNDP/UNFPA was closely involved in the change management process, which was appropriate at the current stage. The resident coordinator system and United Nations country offices should be used to enhance South-South cooperation, and the role of the Executive Secretaries of the regional economic commissions had been strengthened towards that end. The greatest strength of the regional commissions lay at the intergovernmental and normative level, however.

With regard to the early warning system for natural or man-made disasters, the Department of Humanitarian Affairs information system was excellent, but the Administrative Committee on Coordination would continue to seek ways to improve its functioning. In his view, it was desirable to maintain common leadership in areas undergoing humanitarian emergencies. In Rwanda and Burundi, for example, the humanitarian coordinator also fulfilled the resident coordinator functions. He agreed that there was a desperate need to continue to promote regular development activities in such areas for the long-term benefit of the affected country.

Ms. SADIK (Executive Director, United Nations Population Fund) said that in her capacity as Executive Director, she signed any instructions to the field on coordination issues, as a demonstration of the Fund's commitment to enhancing coordination. If the Project Action Committees were to function as intended there must be more active participation. Currently some agencies were represented by very junior staff or were not represented at all.

Absence of common policies and procedures was one of the most important factors limiting the effectiveness of coordination efforts. Some steps had been taken in the Joint Consultative Group on Policies towards a common country

assessment by linking the Country Strategy Note with programme formulation and evaluation. Common guidelines on monitoring and evaluation and thematic evaluations in such areas as health or education would be extremely helpful. A common document and time-frame format would also be desirable. The Executive Board system was an improvement over the former Governing Council, and had led to a more open dialogue.

With regard to South-South cooperation, UNFPA had an active programme funded and promoted by donors. The country support teams held regular meetings with country representatives where the regional commissions were also represented as part of the multi-disciplinary team.

Ms. BERTINI (Executive Director, World Food Programme) said that approximately 60 out of its 80 field offices shared common premises with UNDP or other agencies and used the same personnel system for hiring local staff. Country directors had limited decision-making authority compared with other agencies, but she hoped for improvement in that area. As for recruitment, three World Food Programme country directors had become resident coordinators since 1991, while nine of its staff had been seconded as humanitarian coordinators to the Department of Humanitarian Affairs.

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and WFP had set up a "vulnerability mapping" project to provide early warning of areas where food security problems might arise. In terms of South-South cooperation, WFP purchased over $709 million in goods and services each year, most of which was spent in developing countries. Transferring more management and decision-making authority to the field would enhance those efforts, however.

Ms. SHAM POO (Deputy Executive Director, United Nations Children's Fund) said that, as a tangible indication of its commitment to the implementation of resolution 50/120 at the field level, UNICEF was an active participant in country teams and in those thematic groups that fell within its mandate. She would like to see more UNICEF staff as resident coordinators, but agreed that the most important consideration was a good match between an individual and the country in question.

With regard to the role of Executive Board, the Management Excellence Programme had thus far been a positive experience, and an excellent dialogue had been established with the Executive Board, which she hoped would continue during the implementation phase. UNICEF participated in South-South cooperation

through contacts between its country offices as well as with other agencies, and also through procurement of goods and services in developing countries.

Ms. ALBRECTSEN (Observer for Denmark) said that she could envision a scenario where a fragmented United Nations system might find itself in a situation in which developing countries demanded services according to their needs and donors supplied development funds through a mixture of altruism and self-interest. Presumably that would lead to erosion of the concept of multilateralism. It would be helpful to hear whether the Executive Heads felt that the Council was focusing on the right area by emphasizing coordination at the country level; perhaps it should focus instead on how the system could present a stronger profile in service delivery. It also seemed that, in transmitting information on decisions and resolutions to the field, the various Funds and Programmes should offer some comments on those decisions.

Mr. AGGREY (Ghana) asked whether the agency which provided the resident coordinator was also responsible for providing the additional resources required for the discharge of the coordinator's responsibilities. He also wondered whether it might not be possible to formulate common guidelines for the implementation at the field level of resolutions and decisions adopted at headquarters. Finally, it would be useful to know what criteria were used for dividing up expenditure on common services and shared premises.

Mr. RAZA (Pakistan) asked what steps were being taken to promote decentralization and thus provide greater opportunities for creative action by field representatives. He would also welcome comments on the Secretary-General's observations that none of the current proposals for harmonizing and simplifying rules and procedures were sustainable in the long term, given the increased burden that they would impose on country offices.

With regard to cooperation between UNDP and the World Bank, he wondered whether the different strategic visions of the two organizations adversely affected the efforts of UNDP in such areas as poverty eradication. Finally, he would welcome additional information on the Inter-Agency Committee on Women, and particularly on the difference between its work and that of the other Inter-Agency Task Forces.

Ms. KRISHNA (India) asked what progress had been made towards harmonizing the budgets of the various United Nations funds and programmes in order to ensure a more rational use of resources.

Ms. REMMELZWAAL (Netherlands) said that the Council should provide greater policy guidance to United Nations funds and programmes in the area of operational activities. With regard to the division of work among the various agencies, she wondered whether, given the reality of declining core resources, it might be possible for each agency to concentrate only on those areas in which it enjoyed a comparative advantage, thereby avoiding duplication and overlap.

Mr. SYARGEEU (Belarus) welcomed the news that UNDP devoted 90 per cent of its resources to low-income countries. He wondered whether the Programme envisaged any action to further strengthen that approach to the allocation of resource flows.

Mrs. REBONG (Philippines) said that it was not clear to her why resident coordinators were required to leave their respective agencies before they could assume their new functions. She noted further that field representatives in some countries were involved in resource mobilization and wondered to what extent that practice impacted on the overall allocation of core resources in the countries concerned.

Mr. JALLOW (Observer for the Gambia) asked what progress had been made by UNFPA in preparing its study on the capacity of recipient countries to absorb development assistance and whether that study was related to the elaboration of an African development strategy.

Mr. GALVEZ (Chile) sought comments on how the strategic vision of each fund and programme was reflected in its internal structures and approaches and on whether mission statements were used to promote a certain profile of the agency concerned within the international community.

Ms. SIRVE (Finland) asked what actions the different funds and programmes proposed to take with a view to achieving greater decentralization.

Ms. BERGERON (Canada) asked whether the absence of a mechanism to evaluate the performance of the United Nations Resident Coordinator in Egypt was an exception or the norm.

Mr. FELTON (United Kingdom) asked whether the other United Nations funds and programmes had strengthened collaboration with the Bretton Woods institutions in operational activities at the country level as UNFPA had done.

Mr. AVALLE (Argentina) asked how the discussions on coordination which took place in ACC were being translated into action at the field level. He was

not convinced that the Council was fulfilling its role as the principal coordinating body of the United Nations.

Mr. SPETH (Administrator, United Nations Development Programme), replying to the questions, said that there was a greater lack of coordination in the intergovernmental process than at the level of operational activities and it was time for the Council to fulfil the responsibility entrusted to it by the Charter. In his view, the Council should be split into two committees, one dealing with operational activities and the other continuing the intergovernmental dialogue on issues arising from the global conferences.

As for the evolution of the United Nations system at the country level, competition among the different funds and programmes was normal and even healthy. He noted, however, that progress had been made towards harmonization of programme budget cycles.

Responsibility for the regional coordinator system had originally been entrusted to UNDP because, of all the United Nations funds and programmes, it provided the most resources in terms of time, funding and training and, indeed, focused on development activities. An added justification now was the need for common leadership of the resident coordinator system. However, the Programme did not see itself as competing with its sister agencies but as contributing to United Nations operational activities as a whole. Arrangements were being made to include evaluation of a resident coordinator's performance as part of the overall staff assessment programme. Other agencies should also have an input in that exercise. It would also be helpful for the evaluation mechanism to assess the performance of other heads of country offices in the field of coordination. UNDP would raise that matter at the following meeting of the Consultative Committee on Programme and Operational Questions (CCPOQ).

Ms. SADIK (Executive Director, United Nations Population Fund) said that the heads of funds and programmes did indeed have certain ideas on what could be done to strengthen the Council's role and those ideas could be exchanged at a later stage. The scenario described by the representative of Denmark was recognizable but she believed that the Organization had now come to realize the value of coordination and decentralization. Considerable progress had been made in the harmonization of the budgets and programmes of the development agencies whose executive boards had also decided to focus on areas

in which they enjoyed a comparative advantage in order to make optimum use of available resources.

With regard to the mobilization of resources at the country level, core resources were mobilized by headquarters and only in specific, non-core areas were resources mobilized by country representatives; the latter nevertheless had a key role to play in the country-level dialogue with other development partners.

Replying to the question posed by the observer for the Gambia, she said that the study of the absorptive capacities of beneficiary countries was not confined to Africa but encompassed all countries which were unable to absorb the resources allocated to them. While UNFPA was not now engaged in preparing an African strategy, it was considering how best to allocate resources among the different groups of countries and intended to participate fully in the implementation of the Special Initiative on Africa.

National execution was often delayed because of limited national capacities, including inadequate financial auditing and reporting systems. Strengthened collaboration with the United Nations system was therefore necessary to develop those capacities.

Ms. BERTINI (Executive Director of the World Food Programme) said that although resolutions and decisions forwarded to the field were accompanied by covering memorandums, care was taken not to reinterpret texts, which were often the result of extensive debate and careful drafting.

On the subject of allowing space for creativity by country representatives, WFP was currently delegating more authority to senior officials in the field so that the Programme's overall goals could be more effectively met.

With regard to the division of labour among the various funds and programmes, an area in which the Council must play a leadership role, the special strength of WFP lay in responding to food emergencies, since it had personnel who were trained in food aid delivery. The Programme had a strategic plan, which included projections of food aid needs, and also consulted closely with other agencies working in the same field.

On the subject of the mobilization of resources by the country representatives of funds and programmes, authority was sometimes given to the country representatives of donor countries and agencies to allocate certain types of resources. In such cases, the field representatives of United Nations

funds and programmes were authorized to pursue those resources within the framework of their programmes' overall needs.

It was now for the Council to demonstrate that it was indeed a new and reformed organ. It must have clear ideas, for example, on what it wanted to achieve in the areas of multilateralism and development and how to achieve it. The Council also needed to be consistent in its efforts to promote greater coordination within the United Nations system. Its actions should be directed not only to the heads of funds and programmes but also to the technical agencies, whose work was equally vital to the success of global development efforts.

The meeting rose at 1.20 p.m.